

EDUCATION IN TOURISM: ECONOMIC SIGNIFICANCE, THE CHALLENGES OF IGNORANCE, AND ALTERNATIVE PATHS

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Abstract

Highly educated workers play a key role in shaping the tourist offer and improving the overall experience of travellers. The paper posits that education in tourism is crucial for developing sustainable and competitive tourist destinations that effectively utilise their comparative advantages. It aims to present the perspectives of 97 hotel managers and owners in the Western Balkans, using their insights to formulate strategies for enhancing the performance of tourism stakeholders. A majority of respondents believe that tourism education is essential for enhancing service standards and fostering economic development, highlighting its role in increasing employment opportunities and competitiveness within the sector. However, challenges stemming from ignorance, such as insufficient training and misinformation, hinder the industry's growth, emphasising the need for improved education and accurate information to enhance visitor satisfaction and service quality. Various educational pathways, including co-op/internship experiences and short-term training programs, are viewed as the most effective, while online education and government initiatives receive mixed reviews.

Key words: education in tourism, economic benefits, challenges of ignorance, Western Balkan.

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ОБРАЗОВАЊЕ У ТУРИЗМУ: ЕКОНОМСКИ ЗНАЧАЈ, ИЗАЗОВИ НЕЗНАЊА И АЛТЕРНАТИВНИ ПУТЕВИ

Апстракт

Високообразовани радници имају кључну улогу у обликовању туристичке понуде и побољшању укупног доживљаја туриста. У раду се наводи да је образовање у туризму кључно за развој одрживих и конкурентних туристичких дестинација које ефикасно користе своје компаративне предности. Има за циљ да представи перспективе 97 менаџера и власника хотела на Западном Балкану, користећи њихов увид у формулисању стратегија за побољшање учинка заинтересованих страна у туризму. Већина испитаника сматра да је образовање у туризму од суштинског значаја за унапређење стандарда услуга и подстицање економског развоја, истичући његову улогу у повећању могућности запошљавања и конкурентности унутар сектора. Међутим, изазови који произилазе из незнања, као што су недовољна обука и дезинформације, ометају раст индустрије, наглашавајући потребу за побољшаним образовањем и тачним информацијама како би се повећало задовољство посетилаца и квалитет услуге. Различити образовни путеви, укључујући искуства сарадње/стажирања и краткорочне програме обуке, сматрају се најефикаснијим, док онлајн образовање и владине иницијативе добијају различите критике.

Кључне речи: образовање у туризму, економске користи, изазови незнања, Западни Балкан.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the tourism industry has emerged as one of the most significant sectors contributing to global economic growth, underscoring the essential role of education in fostering a skilled workforce capable of navigating the complexities of this dynamic field (Kock et al., 2025). As economies strive to capitalise on the myriad opportunities presented by tourism, a comprehensive understanding of the economic significance of education in this sector becomes increasingly paramount (Cifci et al., 2025). Despite its potential, the industry faces numerous challenges stemming from widespread ignorance regarding the value of tourism education (Kırlar-Can et al., 2024; Choe & Kim, 2024), which can hinder sustainable development and diminish the quality of services provided to travellers (Akyürek et al., 2024).

Education is a vital factor in increasing tourism revenue, as evidenced by the correlation between educational attainment and the quality of services provided in tourism-dependent economies such as Spain and Italy (Marino, 2001; Gómez & Lattanzio, 2024; Li & Sun, 2025). Countries with high levels of education, such as Sweden and Norway, experience increased tourism revenues due to a skilled workforce capable of providing innovative services (Antonson & Jacobsen, 2014; Seraphin et al., 2021; Salminen et al., 2025). The relationship between per capita national income and education further underscores the importance of investing in education,

as nations such as Germany and Finland show greater economic prosperity associated with an educated workforce (Hägglund, 2024). To improve tourism and economic growth, policies should focus on integrating educational strategies with tourism development, addressing challenges such as resource allocation and aligning educational goals with industry needs (Liu et al., 2022).

Education in tourism plays a pivotal role in shaping the economic landscape of regions reliant on this sector (Wang & Sun, 2025). As one of the fastest-growing industries globally, tourism's economic significance cannot be overstated. It not only fosters job creation and revenue generation but also enhances the skill set of the workforce essential for sustaining a competitive advantage (Gao, 2025). However, the tourism sector faces numerous challenges, particularly stemming from ignorance about the importance of cultural heritage and local traditions (Yetiskin, 2025). This ignorance can undermine the tourist experience and hinder sustainable practices. To address these challenges, it is crucial to explore alternative paths that enhance tourism education, such as strategic partnerships between educational institutions and industry players, collaborative internships, and curricula co-created with industry insights (Jørgensen et al., 2024).

Tourism education is at a critical juncture where its alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is both necessary and lacking, which significantly hinders its economic potential. The current curriculum frequently fails to incorporate a critical pedagogy that addresses these global objectives, thereby limiting its capacity to foster the skills and knowledge essential for sustainable industry growth (Rasheed et al., 2024). Moreover, systemic issues such as outdated teaching methods and inadequate resource allocation further detract from the effectiveness of tourism education, necessitating comprehensive reforms to improve educational delivery and outcomes (Ignjatović et al., 2023). This misalignment not only undermines the educational sector's role in achieving the SDGs but also diminishes stakeholder confidence in the sector's ability to meet industry demands. The resultant weakening of stakeholder linkages is detrimental to the sustainable transformation of the tourism sector (Bojović et al., 2024). Enhancing the accessibility and relevance of tourism education is crucial for addressing these challenges and unlocking new pathways for growth and development in the industry (Živković, 2025). By reforming educational content to better align with global sustainability standards and improving stakeholder engagement, the tourism education sector can become a pivotal driver of economic and sustainable advancements (Bangare et al., 2022).

The paper started from the initial hypothesis that education in tourism plays a key role in creating a sustainable, competitive tourist destination that is able to make the best use of all its comparative advantages. The main goal of the work is to present the views of hotel managers and owners

on the example of hotels in the main tourist destinations of the Western Balkans region, and then use their answers to create strategies for a better and more efficient performance of all stakeholders in the tourism market. Also, with examples of good practice from Europe and the World, it was shown how much leading countries benefit from tourism, connecting education with all positive aspects of tourism development. In general, this paper will analyse the economic significance of education in tourism, assess the challenges posed by ignorance, and discuss innovative approaches to improve educational outcomes in this vital industry.

The results showed some important correlations. The UN Development Program highlights a direct correlation between education levels, national income per capita, and tourism income, using Sudan and the Boeing company as contrasting examples. In Sudan, the lack of education leads to poaching and the undervaluation of resources like rhinoceros horns, while Boeing leverages knowledge and culture to generate significant tourism revenue through factory tours. The tourism industry is increasingly recognised as a vital component of the global economy, with 1.446 billion tourists generating \$1.446 trillion in income in 2019, illustrating that tourism serves as the ‘icing’ on the economic ‘cake.’

The Economic Impact of Tourism Education on Workforce Development and Industry Growth: Analysing Opportunities and Challenges

Tourism education serves as a vital catalyst for workforce development and industry growth, creating a multifaceted economic impact that benefits various stakeholders. With the tourism sector being inherently labour-intensive, it requires a highly skilled workforce to effectively manage its operations and meet the demands of a rapidly evolving market (Vaduva, 2020). Consequently, private and public universities, as well as training colleges, are making substantial investments in tourism education to equip students with the requisite skills and knowledge needed in this dynamic field (Elgin & Elveren, 2024). This educational emphasis not only aligns with sustainable development goals but also addresses the continuous adaptation required to meet changing customer needs (Jannat, 2025). Moreover, tourism education enhances the sector’s resilience during economic downturns, showcasing its importance in workforce development strategies that ultimately influence the industry’s growth trajectory (Tan et al., 2025). The correlation between skilled labour and marketability within the tourism sector also highlights how workforce development acts as a strategic marketing tool, promoting a positive perception of the industry while simultaneously enhancing the visitor experience (Sun & Waqas, 2024). The establishment of educational partnerships further solidifies this relationship, as collaborations between the tourism industry and educational institutions are essential for cultivating a capable workforce that can support the sector’s expansion and meet future challenges (Abdurakhmanova &

Ahrorov, 2025). Ultimately, the interplay between tourism education and workforce development fosters both quantitative and qualitative growth in the industry, contributing to an enriched visitor experience that creates a positive feedback loop for ongoing development (Li & Chen, 2024). The economic significance of education in tourism is underscored by its capacity to enhance workforce skills and competencies. A well-trained workforce is essential for delivering exceptional service in hospitality and tourism sectors, which rely heavily on customer satisfaction for repeat business. According to Arenhart and Souza (2025), a study conducted by the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) highlighted that well-educated employees in the hospitality sector lead to higher revenue per available room (RevPAR) for hotels, demonstrating a direct correlation between education and economic performance. Moreover, specialised courses in tourism management have emerged to address the unique challenges of this industry (Ur Rehman, 2024). Universities worldwide now offer degrees focused on sustainable tourism, event management, and travel technology, preparing graduates for a dynamic career landscape (Gemar et al., 2023). These programs not only provide theoretical knowledge but also practical skills, enabling students to navigate the complexities of the tourism market effectively. In turn, this education empowers individuals and enhances the overall quality of service provided in the industry, ultimately contributing to economic growth and stability (Zheng et al., 2023; Lei et al., 2024).

*The Impact of Ignorance on Tourism Development:
Identifying Challenges and Opportunities for Sustainable Practices*

The ignorance surrounding environmental, social, and economic factors significantly hampers sustainable tourism development. Without sufficient environmental information, tourism activities can lead to detrimental practices that undermine the very resources they depend upon (Iaquinto et al., 2017). The challenges are compounded by poor data on water, energy, and material usage, making it difficult for stakeholders to implement effective sustainability metrics (Abdollahi et al., 2023). Additionally, local communities often face deprivation in income, housing, and health benefits, exacerbated by a lack of awareness surrounding the impacts of tourism development (Siyal et al., 2023). This ignorance not only limits the involvement of local communities in tourism planning but also perpetuates their marginalisation as stakeholders, as they are frequently overlooked by government entities in tourism decision-making processes (Xiong et al., 2022). The absence of community participation further stifles the potential for successful tourism initiatives, as effective planning and collaboration are essential for fostering sustainable practices that benefit everyone involved. Furthermore, the need for specific training and guidelines is critical, as many stakeholders lack a comprehensive understanding of sustainable tourism concepts, which can inhibit their ability to engage

meaningfully in the sector. Addressing these challenges through proactive management and education can create opportunities for local communities, empowering them to become active participants in sustainable tourism development while enhancing their overall quality of life (Lugosi, 2019). Despite its economic significance, the tourism sector grapples with substantial challenges stemming from ignorance regarding cultural heritage and local traditions. A lack of awareness among both tourists and industry professionals can lead to the erosion of local cultures and the commodification of traditions. According to Pianezzi and Ashraf (2022), in areas where cultural festivals are commercialised without understanding their significance, the authenticity of these events can be lost, resulting in tourist dissatisfaction and a diminished experience. This ignorance not only jeopardises the preservation of cultural heritage but also has long-term consequences for the sustainability of tourism in these regions. As tourists increasingly seek authentic experiences, the failure to educate both the workforce and visitors about local customs can lead to a decline in tourism's attractiveness. Consequently, the tourism industry must prioritise education that emphasises the importance of cultural preservation, ensuring that the historical context and significance of local traditions are transmitted effectively to both employees and tourists alike (Baum, 2007).

*Exploring Innovative Approaches to Tourism Education:
Assessing Alternative Pathways for Skill Development and Career
Readiness in a Changing Industry*

In today's rapidly evolving tourism industry, innovative approaches to education and skill development are essential to prepare future professionals effectively. One of the paramount challenges is integrating sustainability into educational frameworks, ensuring that graduates emerge not only with theoretical knowledge but also with a commitment to sustainable practices that address global challenges (Broshi-Chen & Mansfeld, 2021). Moreover, educators are increasingly recognising the need to balance vocational training with liberal arts perspectives, cultivating graduates who possess a comprehensive understanding of both philosophical and sociological foundations (Hardy & Pearson, 2018). This dual focus is critical, as the tourism sector requires professionals who are trained as agents of change, equipped to navigate the complexities of modern tourism dynamics (Lim et al., 2024). Programs that strictly emphasise technical skills without a practical application risk detaching students from the realities of the job market, which can lead to a mismatch between graduates' competencies and industry needs (Zhang, 2024). Therefore, it is crucial to develop a curriculum that emphasises practical skills alongside academic knowledge, particularly in emerging markets, where the demand for multifaceted skill sets is on the rise (Cardoso, et al., 2024). Furthermore, the integration of multidisciplinary approaches—drawing from subjects such

as geography, sociology, and politics—can enhance the educational experience and better prepare students for the varied challenges they will face in the tourism sector (Stangl et al., 2024). By fostering an environment that encourages continuous learning and adaptation, tourism education can not only enhance employability but also contribute positively to the resilience of the industry as a whole (Liu et al., 2024). To combat the challenges of ignorance in the tourism sector, alternative paths for enhancing education are crucial. One effective strategy is fostering partnerships between educational institutions and industry stakeholders, which can bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. According to Huang and Baker (2021), programs that involve joint ventures between universities and tourism companies facilitate the development of curricula that are relevant to current industry trends. Additionally, collaborative internships and work placements provide students with hands-on experience, enabling them to apply their classroom learning in real-world settings. Such experiences not only enhance their employability but also contribute to a more skilled workforce. Furthermore, co-created curricula, developed in consultation with industry professionals, ensure that educational content reflects the evolving needs of the tourism sector (Daniel et al., 2017). This approach allows for the integration of emerging trends, such as ecotourism and digital marketing, into educational programs, preparing graduates to meet the demands of the modern tourism landscape. By prioritising these alternative paths, the tourism industry can cultivate a workforce that is not only knowledgeable but also equipped to drive sustainable growth (Mertena et al., 2022).

METHODOLOGY

The study included 97 hotel managers and owners from prominent mountain hotels in the Western Balkans region – hotels at the Korab mountain (Albania and North Macedonia), Radomire village and Tomor mountain (Albania), Zlatibor, Tara, Kopaonik, and Stara Planina mountains (Serbia), Brezovica (Kosovo and Metohija), Durmitor (Montenegro), and Jahorina (BiH). Contact was established with managers and owners by e-mail, and a list of variables was sent to them, requiring responses on a five-point Likert scale. These hotels were chosen for their visibility and general appeal to tourists. This represents the most visited group of hotels in the observed region, so the responses are considered to be indicative, and the response from hotel managers and owners was very good. The Western Balkans, both as a political and geographical region, include the economies of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia. This place, seen as the heart of Europe, has a lot of culture and different ways of life, marked by a strong past that often comes with big struggles (Knežević et al., 2024).

The research lasted from the 1st of January, 2025 to the 30th of January 30 2025, with the aim of obtaining data on the extent to which hotel managers consider an educated workforce to be important for the management of a tourist destination. Managers were sent a group of 30 questions by e-mail, which they answered on a five-point Likert scale. The procedure used to analyse the obtained data is the Pearson Chi-Square Test. This test is supposed to verify whether there is a statistical significance in the answers provided by the respondents based on their years of experience in the hotel industry and managerial function. For there to be statistical significance with the years of experience in the hotel industry and managerial function of the respondent, the assumed condition is that the p-value is less than or equal to 0.05.

Economic significance of tourism education:

- A well-educated workforce is essential for the success of the tourism industry.
- Tourism education significantly improves a country's competitiveness in the global market.
- Higher education in tourism leads to better wages and career advancement.
- Tourism training programs help increase the efficiency and profitability of businesses.
- Investment in tourism education has a direct impact on national economic development.

Challenges of ignorance in tourism:

- Insufficient education in tourism leads to mismanagement of tourist destinations.
- Untrained staff in tourism businesses negatively impacts visitor experiences.
- A lack of industry knowledge leads to unethical practices, such as cultural exploitation.
- The absence of formal education results in poor customer service in the tourism industry.
- Many tourism employees lack adequate knowledge about cultural sensitivity and diversity.

Alternative paths for tourism education:

- Short-term training programs are as effective as formal degrees in tourism.
- Online education and virtual learning are viable alternatives to traditional tourism education.
- On-the-job experience is more valuable than classroom learning in tourism.
- Government initiatives should focus on providing free or subsidised tourism training.
- Hands-on vocational training is more beneficial than theoretical education in tourism.

The second part of the research was the Desk research. Desk research, referred to as secondary research, entails the collection and analysis of pre-existing data from diverse sources to derive insights regarding a specific topic. This method is vital within the realms of academia, business, and policy formulation. Within the sphere of tourism education, desk research facilitates an understanding of economic importance, industry challenges, and potential alternatives, all while eliminating the necessity for primary data gathering.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows that education in tourism is widely perceived as having significant economic benefits, particularly in terms of providing a skilled workforce, improving the quality of services and contributing to economic growth. Education in tourism plays a vital economic role by equipping individuals with the skills needed for the tourism industry, thereby improving the quality of services and contributing to overall economic growth. A significant majority of respondents agree that education in tourism is necessary to ensure a skilled workforce, improve service standards and encourage economic development. The data indicates strong support for the idea that a well-educated workforce in tourism leads to increased employment opportunities and competitiveness in the sector. A significant number of respondents strongly agree that education in tourism is essential to providing a skilled workforce in the tourism industry. This indicates the high perceived importance of tourism education in workforce development. They also agree that tourism education improves the quality of services offered in the tourism sector. This suggests that education is seen as a key factor in improving service standards and customer satisfaction. There is strong agreement that tourism education contributes to overall economic growth. This highlights the wider economic impact of a well-educated tourism workforce on the economy. Additional benefits such as greater employment opportunities, higher income levels and improved competitiveness of the tourism sector are also recognised by most respondents.

Table 1. *Economic Significance of Tourism Education*

		Experience in the hotel industry and managerial function.				Total
		Less than 5 years	6-15 years	16-25 years	More than 26 years	
A well-educated workforce is essential for the success of the tourism industry.	Strongly agree	6	5	23	11	45
	Agree	3	13	24	6	46
	Neutral	0	0	4	2	6
	Total	9	18	51	19	97
Pearson Chi-Square	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)			
	8,896a	6	,180			
Tourism education significantly improves a country's competitiveness in the global market.	Strongly agree	4	1	25	11	41
	Agree	5	17	22	6	50
	Neutral	0	0	4	2	6
	Total	9	18	51	19	97
Pearson Chi-Square	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)			
	18,496	6	,005			
		Experience in the hotel industry and managerial function.				Total
		Less than 5 years	6-15 years	16-25 years	More than 26 years	
Higher education in tourism leads to better wages and career advancement.	Strongly agree	6	7	29	12	54
	Agree	3	11	21	5	40
	Neutral	0	0	1	2	3
	Total	9	18	51	19	97
Pearson Chi-Square	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)			
	8,638	6	,195			
		Experience in the hotel industry and managerial function.				Total
		Less than 5 years	6-15 years	16-25 years	More than 26 years	
Tourism training programs help increase the efficiency and profitability of businesses.	Strongly agree	6	8	33	17	64
	Agree	3	10	14	2	29
	Neutral	0	0	4	0	4
	Total	9	18	51	19	97
Pearson Chi-Square	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)			
	12,962	6	,044			
		Experience in the hotel industry and managerial function.				Total
		Less than 5 years	6-15 years	16-25 years	More than 26 years	
Investment in tourism education has a direct impact on national economic development.	Strongly agree	4	4	18	8	34
	Agree	5	14	27	9	55
	Neutral	0	0	6	2	8
	Total	9	18	51	19	97
Pearson Chi-Square	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)			
	6,285	6	,392			

Tourism is a multifaceted industry that contributes significantly to the global economy. However, the sector faces a number of challenges, especially those stemming from ignorance. Ignorance in tourism can manifest itself in various forms, such as insufficient education and training, lack of industry knowledge, and misinformation. These challenges can negatively affect the quality of service, visitor satisfaction and the overall development of tourism. Understanding and addressing these challenges is critical to the sustainable growth of the tourism industry. Table 2 shows that addressing the challenge of ignorance in tourism is essential for the sustainable development of the industry. By improving education and training, improving industry knowledge, managing internal and external factors and providing accurate information, the tourism sector can significantly improve service quality and visitor satisfaction. Real-world examples, such as the success of well-trained tour guides in improving the visitor experience or the impact of accurate information on tourist satisfaction, illustrate the importance of addressing these challenges. The challenges of ignorance in tourism primarily come from insufficient education and training of personnel, and a lack of knowledge of the industry, which leads to poor quality of services, and the presence of internal and external factors that hinder the development of tourism. In addition, many tourists have high expectations, but often experience disappointment due to misinformation or a lack of accurate information. Addressing these challenges is key to improving service quality, increasing visitor satisfaction and fostering sustainable growth in the tourism sector.

A significant number of respondents fully agree that insufficient education and training of tourism staff is a challenge. This indicates the need for better training programs to improve the quality of services. Most respondents agree that a lack of industry knowledge leads to poor service quality. This highlights the importance of industry-specific knowledge and continuous learning. A significant number of respondents agree that internal and external factors hinder the development of tourism. This suggests that both internal governance and external conditions must be addressed in order to encourage tourism growth. Many respondents agree that tourists often have high expectations, but are disappointed by the lack of accurate information. This highlights the need for accurate and reliable information to effectively manage tourist expectations. Ignorance challenges in tourism include insufficient education and training of staff, lack of knowledge in the industry leading to poor service quality, internal and external factors that hinder tourism development, and tourists who have high expectations but are often disappointed due to a lack of accurate information. Addressing these challenges requires improved training programs, better industry knowledge, effective management of internal and external factors, and provision of accurate information to tourists.

Table 2. Challenges of Ignorance in Tourism

		Experience in the hotel industry and managerial function.				Total
		Less than 5 years	6-15 years	16-25 years	More than 26 years	
Insufficient education in tourism leads to mismanagement of tourist destinations.	Strongly agree	6	9	32	11	58
	Agree	3	9	15	6	33
	Neutral	0	0	4	2	6
	Total	9	18	51	19	97
		Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)		
Pearson Chi-Square		4,625	6	,593		
Untrained staff in tourism businesses negatively impacts visitor experiences.	Strongly agree	6	7	32	12	57
	Agree	3	11	18	5	37
	Neutral	0	0	1	2	3
	Total	9	18	51	19	97
		Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)		
Pearson Chi-Square		9,296	6	,158		

		Experience in the hotel industry and managerial function.				Total
		Less than 5 years	6-15 years	16-25 years	More than 26 years	
A lack of industry knowledge leads to unethical practices, such as cultural exploitation.	Strongly agree	6	5	25	11	47
	Agree	3	13	22	6	44
	Neutral	0	0	4	2	6
	Total	9	18	51	19	97
		Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)		
Pearson Chi-Square		9,034	6	,172		

		Experience in the hotel industry and managerial function.				Total
		Less than 5 years	6-15 years	16-25 years	More than 26 years	
The absence of formal education results in poor customer service in the tourism industry.	Strongly agree	4	2	25	12	43
	Agree	5	16	22	5	48
	Neutral	0	0	4	2	6
	Total	9	18	51	19	97
		Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)		
Pearson Chi-Square		16,920	6	,010		

		Experience in the hotel industry and managerial function.				Total
		Less than 5 years	6-15 years	16-25 years	More than 26 years	
Many tourism employees lack adequate knowledge about cultural sensitivity and diversity.	Strongly agree	6	7	37	13	63
	Agree	3	11	14	5	33
	Neutral	0	0	0	1	1
	Total	9	18	51	19	97
		Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)		
Pearson Chi-Square		11,343	6	,078		

Table 3 provides a comprehensive overview of the different educational pathways in tourism and their perceived effectiveness based on the respondents' level of experience in hospitality and management. Co-op/internship experiences and short-term training programs are generally considered the most effective, while online education programs and government initiatives receive more mixed reviews. Technical/vocational schools are also viewed positively, especially by those with less experience. To provide a more in-depth analysis with specific data points, let us extract and summarise the key quantitative details from the table for each educational pathway. Alternative pathways to tourism education include various methods such as short-term training programs, online education, co-op/internship experiences, government initiatives that promote specialised education, and technical/vocational schools. Each of these pathways was evaluated based on the respondents' level of experience in the hotel industry, revealing that co-op/internship experiences and short-term training were generally considered the most effective. Online education and government initiatives received mixed feedback, while technical/vocational schools were rated positively, especially by those with less experience.

In the statistics of the UN Development Program, you can see a direct correlation between the level of education of the population and the level of income from tourism, which also follows the level of national income per capita, with the same statistics showing a direct correlation of the level of national income per capita and the level of the literacy of the population. The direct connection between tourism, education and culture is excellently explained by the state of Sudan as an example with white rhinos and the Boeing company in the USA. In Sudan, poachers kill a rhinoceros and sell the horn for a pittance - about a thousand USD, which in the pharmaceutical industry can reach a price of up to a million USD. A rooted horn can weigh up to 10 kilograms and, at a price of one hundred thousand dollars per kilogram, is worth a million USD (Idroes et al., 2024; Ahmed, 2025). So, tourism in Sudan pays tribute to ignorance/lack of education and culture. In contrast to Sudan, the Americans at the Boeing factory, by organising a museum and tourist visits to the production halls of the most modern commercial airplanes, generate tens of millions of income from tourism thanks to knowledge and education (Van der Linden, 2012). In addition to other things, Boeing is a great example of the direct connection of tourism with serious culture and serious education-knowledge. Thanks to the latest technologies, equipment and professional staff, Boeing makes the most modern commercial airplanes, which requires the investment of a number of inputs and a lot of time. However, Boeing has to sell the product/planes in order to achieve the goal - profit, while, in the case of tourism, tourists come and pay Boeing to essentially watch and sightsee. The importance of tourism is perfectly explained by the income from tourism and the number of tourists in ten leading countries, shown in Table 4.

Table 3. *Alternative Paths for Tourism Education*

		Experience in the hotel industry and managerial function.				Total
		Less than 5 years	6-15 years	16-25 years	More than 26 years	
Short-term training programs are as effective as formal degrees in tourism.	Strongly agree	6	7	33	12	58
	Agree	3	11	18	5	37
	Neutral	0	0	0	2	2
	Total	9	18	51	19	97
		Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)		
Pearson Chi-Square		13,188	6	,040		
Online education and virtual learning are viable alternatives to traditional tourism education.	Strongly agree	6	7	27	11	51
	Agree	3	11	20	6	40
	Neutral	0	0	4	2	6
	Total	9	18	51	19	97
		Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)		
Pearson Chi-Square		5,901	6	,434		
		Experience in the hotel industry and managerial function.				Total
		Less than 5 years	6-15 years	16-25 years	More than 26 years	
On-the-job experience is more valuable than classroom learning in tourism.	Strongly agree	4	1	28	13	46
	Agree	5	17	19	4	45
	Neutral	0	0	4	2	6
	Total	9	18	51	19	97
		Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)		
Pearson Chi-Square		24,183	6	,000		
		Experience in the hotel industry and managerial function.				Total
		Less than 5 years	6-15 years	16-25 years	More than 26 years	
Government initiatives should focus on providing free or subsidized tourism training.	Strongly agree	6	7	29	16	58
	Agree	3	11	21	2	37
	Neutral	0	0	1	1	2
	Total	9	18	51	19	97
		Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)		
Pearson Chi-Square		11,324	6	,079		
		Experience in the hotel industry and managerial function.				Total
		Less than 5 years	6-15 years	16-25 years	More than 26 years	
Hands-on vocational training is more beneficial than theoretical education in tourism.	Strongly agree	6	5	27	11	49
	Agree	3	13	20	6	42
	Neutral	0	0	4	2	6
	Total	9	18	51	19	97
		Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)		
Pearson Chi-Square		9,530	6	,146		

Table 4. Leading countries by number of foreign tourists and income in 2019 and 2023

No. State	Number of international tourists 2019 (mill.)	No. State	Tourism revenues 2019 (bill. USD)
1. France	90.9	1. USA	199.0
2. Spain	83.5	2. Spain	79.7
3. USA	79.4	3. France	63.5
4. China	65.7	4. Thailand	59.8
5. Italy	64.5	5. United Kingdom	58.6
6. Turkey	51.2	6. Italy	49.6
7. Mexico	45.0	7. Germany	41.8
8. Thailand	39.9	8. China	35.8
9. United Kingdom	39.4	9. Turkey	34.3
10. Germany	35.2	10. Mexico	24.6
No. State	International tourist arrivals 2023 (mill.)	No. State	International tourism receipts 2023 (bill. USD)
1. France	100.0	1. USA	175.9
2. Spain	85.2	2. Spain	92.2
3. USA	66.5	3. United Kingdom	73.9
4. Italy	57.2	4. France	68.6
5. Turkey	55.2	5. Italy	55.9
6. Mexico	42.2	6. United Arab Emirates	51.9
7. United Kingdom	37.2	7. Turkey	49.5
8. Germany	34.8	8. Australia	46.6
9. Greece	32.7	9. Canada	39.2
10. Austria	30.9	10. Japan	38.6

Source: World Tourism Barometer, Volume 22, Issue 2, May 2024

That tourism is becoming the most ‘refined’ part of the international economy is confirmed by quantitative trends in the tourism industry and UNWTO statistics, with 1,446 million tourists and USD 1,446 billion in income at the global level in 2019, as shown in Table 5. For the purpose of clearer interpretation and easier understanding, the following sections provide a tabular overview of tourist arrivals and tourism income worldwide, organised by continents and individual regions (Tables 5 and 6), while the leading countries are presented in Table 4. Illustratively speaking, the conclusion that emerges is the following: if the economy is the cake, then tourism is the icing on it (<https://www.unwto.org/tourism-in-2030-agenda>, 2025).

Table 5. Trends in the number of international tourists in the world and in certain tourist regions, 2010-2024 (percentage of changes compared to 2019)

Region	2010	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2010– 2019	2019– 2020	2019– 2022	2019– 2023
World	956	1465	406	460	975	1305	1445	53.3	-72.1	-34.3	-10.9
Europe	491.2	742.4	239.4	301.3	609.5	708.4	747.3	51.9	-67.6	-20.3	-4.6
Asia and the Pacific	208.2	362.7	58.9	26.7	93.3	237.7	315.9	72.7	-83.5	-72.1	-34.5
America	150.3	219.3	69.7	81.8	157.2	200.1	213.5	45.9	-68.2	-29.0	-8.7
Africa	50.4	68.8	18.8	19.9	47.2	65.6	73.6	35.1	-72.9	-31.7	-4.6
Middle East	56.1	71.6	19.4	30.5	68.0	93.5	94.8	30.1	-72.9	-10.1	30.6

Source: World Tourism Organization (UN Tourism), Data as collected by UN Tourism, January 2025.

Table 6. Income from international tourism: the world and individuals tourist regions, 2010-2023

Region	2010	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2010– 2019	2019– 2020	2019– 2022	2019– 2023
World	927	1466	536	637	1011.5	1395	58.1	-63.4	-31.0	-4.6
Europe	409.3	572.2	233.8	327.0	548.6	553	39.8	-59.1	-4.1	-3.3
Asia and the Pacific	255.3	441.3	132.6	90.0	131.4	375.1	72.9	-70.0	-70.2	-15.0
America	180.7	322.8	127.1	140.0	243.9	236.0	78.6	-60.6	-24.4	-26.9
Africa	30.4	38.9	14.0	17.0	11.7	47.5	28.0	-64.0	-69.9	22.1
Middle East	51.7	90.5	28.7	62.0	75.9	137.4	75.0	-68.3	-16.1	51.4

Source: UNWTO, 2024, 2023, 2022, 2021, 2020

CONSLUSION

Education in tourism holds significant economic importance by enhancing workforce skills and competencies, while also addressing the challenges posed by ignorance regarding cultural heritage and local traditions. The knowledge and training provided through specialised courses and partnerships with industry stakeholders empower individuals to contribute to the sector's growth and sustainability. However, to fully leverage the potential of tourism education, it is essential to implement innovative approaches that foster collaboration between educational institutions and the industry. By prioritising awareness, cultural preservation, and practical experience, the tourism sector can build a resilient workforce that not only meets the demands of a dynamic market but also respects and preserves the cultural heritage that is integral to its success. Ultimately, a comprehensive

and well-structured educational framework will be key to navigating the complexities of the tourism industry and ensuring its continued prosperity.

The tourism industry has become a crucial driver of global economic growth, highlighting the importance of education in developing a skilled workforce capable of addressing the sector's complexities. Despite its potential, the industry faces challenges due to widespread ignorance about the value of tourism education, which can impede sustainable development and service quality. This paper explores the intersections between education and tourism, advocating for enhanced educational frameworks that can tackle these challenges while promoting sustainable growth. Countries with higher education levels, such as Sweden and Norway, demonstrate increased tourism revenues, emphasising the need for policies that integrate educational strategies with tourism development. The paper also addresses the critical role of education in shaping the economic landscape of tourism-dependent regions, noting that ignorance about cultural heritage can undermine the tourist experience. Innovative educational approaches, such as partnerships between institutions and industry players, are essential for improving tourism education and addressing gaps in knowledge. Furthermore, aligning tourism education with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is necessary to unlock the sector's full economic potential. The research highlights the correlation between education levels and national income, using contrasting examples from Sudan and Boeing to illustrate the impact of education on tourism revenue. Ultimately, the paper calls for a paradigm shift in how tourism education is perceived and implemented, positing that a robust educational foundation is vital for overcoming existing obstacles and enhancing the industry's contribution to economic prosperity.

*Future Research Directions in Tourism Education:
Evaluating Economic Impact, Bridging Knowledge Gaps, and Uncovering Innovative Development Pathways*

The future of tourism education lies in its ability to adapt and respond to the evolving needs of the industry, particularly through the integration of more comprehensive and innovative educational frameworks. A key area for future research is the longitudinal evaluation of graduates from humanistic tourism management programs to assess the effectiveness of the education they received and the pathways they pursue post-graduation. This evaluation should extend to examining whether these graduates are implementing ethical and respectful strategies in their professional practices, contributing to a transformative impact within their businesses and destinations. There is also a need to recognise and measure how these strategies are perceived by other stakeholders in the tourism industry, assessing their value and transformative potential. By focusing on these aspects, future research can not only bridge significant knowledge gaps but also un-

cover innovative development pathways that can foster a more ethical and sustainable tourism sector. Moreover, integrating transdisciplinarity into tourism education can enhance curricula development, equipping future decision-makers with the skills needed to adopt a broader and more critical perspective on the industry. This approach requires an evaluation of current educational practices and an openness to new methodologies that align with the industry's dynamic nature. Ultimately, these research directions will help reshape tourism education, ensuring it remains relevant and impactful, and empowering graduates to drive meaningful change in the tourism industry.

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ОБРАЗОВАЊЕ У ТУРИЗМУ: ЕКОНОМСКИ ЗНАЧАЈ, ИЗАЗОВИ НЕЗНАЊА И АЛТЕРНАТИВНИ ПУТЕВИ

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Резиме

Туристичка индустрија је постала кључни покретач глобалног економског раста, наглашавајући важност образовања у развоју квалификоване радне снаге способне да одговори на комплексност сектора. Упркос свом потенцијалу, индустрија се суочава са изазовима због широко распрострањеног незнања о вредности туристичког образовања, што може да омета одрживи развој и квалитет услуга. Да би се унапредио туризам и економски раст, неопходно је интегрисати образовне стратегије са потребама индустрије, неговати партнерства између образовних институција и актера у индустрији, и реформисати наставне планове и програме како би се ускладили са циљевима одрживог развоја, на крају откључавајући нове путеве за раст и побољшање укупног квалитета услуга у сектору туризма. У студији је учествовало 97 менаџера и власника хотела из познатих планинских хотела широм Западног Балкана, са циљем да се процени значај образоване радне снаге у туристичком менаџменту. Истраживање је нагласило да је добро образована радна снага кључна за унапређење квалитета услуга, унапређење конкурентности и допринос економском расту у сектору туризма. Поред тога, резултати су нагласили изазове које представља недовољно образовање, као што су лош квалитет услуга и лоше управљање, док се залажу за иновативне образовне приступе и партнерства између образовних институција и индустрије како би се подстакла квалификована радна снага која поштује културно наслеђе и покреће одрживи развој туризма.